Staff Memorandum

To	Heritage Barrie Committee
Subject	Nine Mile Portage Signage
Date	April 28, 2026
Ward	2
From	M. Banfield, RPP, Executive Director of Development Services
Executive Member Approval	M. Banfield, RPP, Executive Director of Development Services
CAO Approval	M. Prowse, Chief Administrative Officer

Purpose

In response to motion 25-G-059 – Nine Mile Portage Signage, this memo provides an interim update to the Heritage Barrie Committee regarding the progress staff have made to date to explore options to re-establish the Nine Mile Portage signage within Meridian Place. The memo presents two (2) options, including the key considerations associated with each option, for discussion with the Committee with the aim of soliciting their early feedback.

Option 1 – Replace Ontario Heritage Trust Plaque

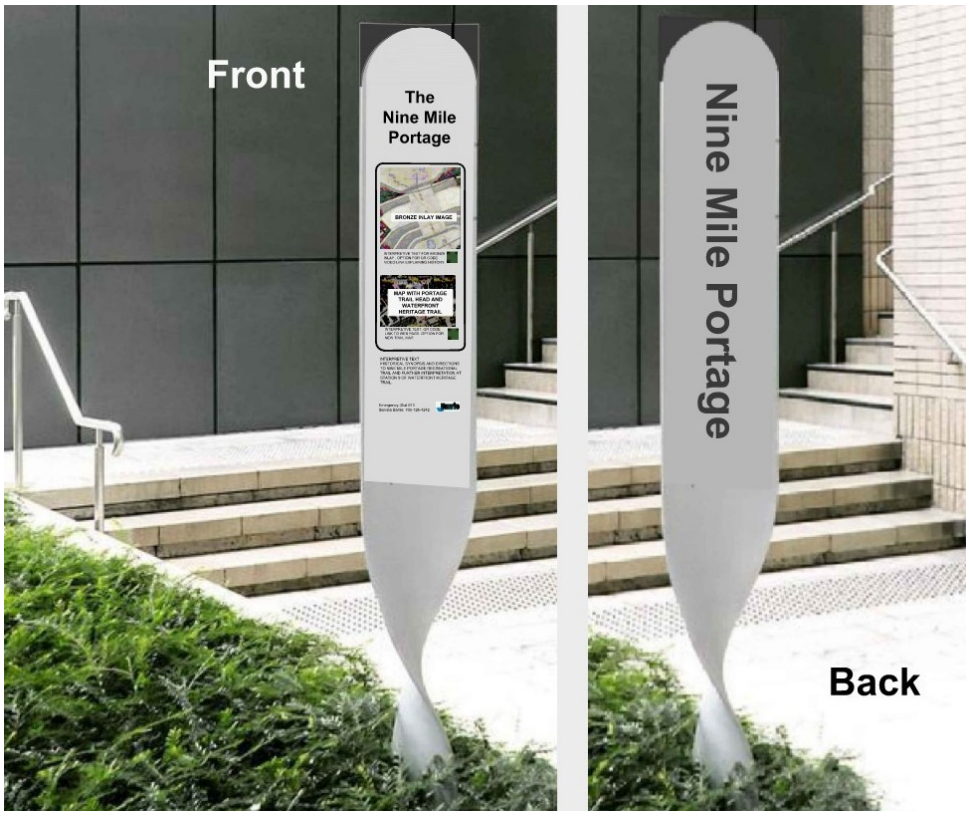
NINE MILE PORTAGE
Site of eastern terminus of an Indian portage from Kempenfeldt Bay to Willow Creek and thence by the Nottawasaga River to Georgian Bay. In the winter of 1813-14, a force under Lieut. Colonel Robert McDouall followed it on the way to relieve the isolated British garrison at Michilimackinac. That summer it was developed as a rough wagon road and till about 1830 was in frequent use for transport of supplies to Penetanguishene and the western military and fur trading posts.
Erected by the Ontario Archaeological and Historic Sites Board.

Above Image: Original 1957 Nine Mile Portage OHT Plaque in Memorial Square location referencing War of 1812 and British Settler Wharf as the eastern terminus of the Nine Mile Portage.

Plaques are owned by the Ontario Heritage Trust (OHT), but are maintained by the municipality. The text is permanent, limited in scope, but are two-sided to display the

information in the two official languages. The cost to replace the plaque as per the OHT website is a minimum of $6,500 plus in-kind support.

Option 2 – New City-Owned Enhanced Interpretive Signage



Above Image: Concept for New Vertical Interpretive Element

New enhanced interpretive signage that is City-owned would provide flexibility with the content, provide innovative ways to provide the historical information, attract more interest from users, and be integrated into the surrounding cultural landscape. A surface-mounted and vertical interpretive/wayfinding element, such as the attached “Water Paddle” concept in Appendix A, meets the above objectives and can be delivered with an estimated cost of:

- **Self-guided enhanced signage:** $4,500–$6,500
- **Optional interactive component:** additional $2,000–$5,000 to include a short interpretive video and lighting

Key Considerations

1. **Cost, Timing, and Control**
    a. An OHT plaque (Option 1) requires a minimum $6,500 fixed fee plus in-kind support, with project timelines potentially extending several years due to provincial program backlogs.
    b. City-led signage (Option 2) allows full control over content, cost, timelines, and coordination with other public-realm improvements and historical interpretive programs.
    c. Municipal signs (Option 2) are cost-effective to maintain and typically covered

under warranty (up to 10 years).

2. **Interpretive Depth and Flexibility**
    a. OHT plaques (Option 1) offer limited space, fixed content, and no images or digital features—best suited to single events or commemorations.
    b. The Nine Mile Portage story is complex, spanning thousands of years of Indigenous presence, in addition to later settler and military history.
    c. Enhanced signage (Option 2) responds to the way that people access information today through phones and electronic devices, allowing digital links, maps, images, and fonts, and can be updated as scholarship, cultural understanding, and technology evolve.

3. **Inclusive Storytelling**
    a. The former OHT plaque's placement, associated with Option 1, fixed the "head" of the portage to Memorial Square, reflecting early 19th-century British survey mapping of a wharf.
    b. This approach does not include Indigenous use of shifting shorelines and the nature of dynamic portage routes over millennia.
    c. Staff recommend avoiding commemorating a single fixed point and instead interpreting the portage as a cultural landscape and travel corridor.

4. **Site Context and Existing Investments**
    a. Either option should have regard for the agreement with the Kiwanis Club of Barrie for their donation of $175,000 towards the construction of Meridian Place concrete steps and the brass inlay commemorating the Nine Mile Portage in the surface of the square.
    b. Enhanced interpretive signage in the square could align with other City-owned nearby historical interpretive signage installations.

5. **Improved Visitor Experience and Wayfinding**
    Enhanced interpretive signage (Option 2) can:
    a. Explain the meaning of the existing brass inlay
    b. Direct visitors to the Nine Mile Portage Recreational Trail
    c. Link to Station 9 of the Waterfront Heritage Trail in Heritage Park
    d. Include QR codes for online maps and digital learning
    e. Improve accessibility and visitor experience through contemporary design and technology that aligns with Memorial Square/Meridian Place as an innovative cultural destination in Barrie.

Next Steps

Following receipt of the feedback on the options from the Heritage Barrie Committee, staff will continue their work leading to a full committee report with recommendation(s) for the June 23, 2026 Heritage Barrie Committee meeting.

Appendix:

Appendix A - Nine Mile Portage Interpretive Element Concept for Memorial Square - “Water Paddle”

Memo Author:

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File #:

R04-NI Nine Mile Portage Trail

Pending #:

P14/25